

Isolation and Creativity:

Ian Fairweather's 1952 Raft Journey

Dael Allison

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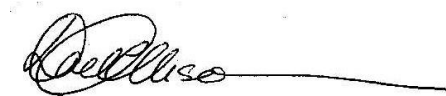
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

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I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DeeLise', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Signature of Student

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Table of Contents	ii
Abstract	vi
 Isolation and Creativity	 1
 Prologue: A man on a raft	 2
Introduction Ian Fairweather (1891-1974): Creativity in Isolation.....	3
Chapter 1 Raftbedraft: Trope for Isolation.....	10
Chapter 2 China and the Drunken Buddha	21
Chapter 3 Island Consciousness.....	36
Chapter 4 No island is an island: Fairweather in the art world	44
Conclusion ‘I paint, dammit!’	59
 Appendices	 64
Appendix 1: Letter from Fairweather to Clayton Bredt.....	64
Appendix 2: Fairweather refusing to acknowledge own art	65
Appendix 3: Fairweather and money	66
Appendix 4: The unreliability of Abbott-Smith as a source.	69
Appendix 5: Fairweather’s Signature	70
 List of References	 71

Each Step into the Light	76
Three paintings found discarded in the mud	78
Each step into the light	81
After the storm	83
Fugitive colours.....	84
Lived in hulk	85
The Rear Admiral.....	87
The Kuru	88
In his mind he sails an ocean	89
Redefining scarlet.....	91
Dreaming poets dreaming	93
Two heads	94
Puffer fish.....	96
Crocodylus	97
Raft only for fair weather	100
Test run.....	101
Remembering the grey house.....	102
Family	105
Schoolboys	106
Demobbed	107
Fragment	109
Small marks we leave.....	110
House	112
Instinct for leaving	114
Shadow within shadow	116

Micky Bigfoot	117
Cast away	118
Artist adrift at sea	120
Nightburst.....	122
Cocky	123
Night raft	124
Monsoon.....	125
Wabi sabi.....	127
Shark alarm	129
Monsoon on four panels.....	131
Scuppered.....	132
Write me off as a fool.....	134
Sketch for a painting	135
Bacarole.....	136
Cormorant	138
Ticket out of China.....	140
Chi-tien stands on his head	142
Roi Soleil.....	144
Words like any painted lines	146
Message in a milk bottle	148
H.S. Ede Esq.	149
Lit bateau.....	151
Flying fish	152
At night my bed is hooked	153
Lacuna	154
Reflection	156

Coda.....	157
Bus out of Darwin, 29 April 2012.....	158
Raftbedraft.....	160
 Notes on the poems.....	 162

Abstract

Scottish-born Ian Fairweather (1891-1974) is acclaimed as one of Australia's greatest modernist artists. A recluse and wanderer, he substantially refused to engage with society and the art world. At the age of sixty he made a potentially suicidal sixteen day crossing of the Timor Sea on a ramshackle raft. On the basis of this journey, and his choice in old age to eschew comfort and live like a hermit, public perceptions have tended to polarise—he is considered either genius or madman. The legend of Fairweather's life can eclipse the importance of his art.

The questions addressed in this thesis are: what motivated the artist to go to such lengths of disassociation, and how important was this to his creativity? To determine the factors underpinning Fairweather's philosophy and impulse to self-isolate, his early life and itinerant years in Australia and Asia, his raft journey, and his preference for islands are examined. The problem is the artist left few clues. The body of his known work amounts to some 550 paintings and drawings, one small sculpture, one published book and a few artefacts including letters and an unpublished manuscript. These have already been extensively researched.

In aiming to present a new perspective on Fairweather and offer deeper insights into his life choices, this thesis draws the conclusion that despite his itinerant lifestyle Ian Fairweather was a strongly self-directed individual who opted for a life of minimalism based on non-materialist principles. His deeply spiritual work and his facility with Chinese language, culture and calligraphy reveal a man of great complexity who developed an 'island mentality' in order to fully realise his art.

Research is based on available literature, news media, the internet and Fairweather's art. Interviews were conducted with key Fairweather researchers Murray Bail and Tony Twigg. Field research was undertaken in Brisbane, Bribie Island and Darwin. The archives of H. S. Ede were accessed at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge University, UK. The works of creativity theorists were examined to determine the relevance of psychosis to

creativity, Fairweather's working methods were considered against Galenson's theory of art, and comparisons were drawn with fellow isolationists, artist Paul Gauguin and the fictional Robinson Crusoe.

The creative work developed in parallel with this thesis is the manuscript *Each step into the light*: poems exploring Ian Fairweather's life, his raft journey, and his compelling works of art.

